

“Secondary Happiness in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*”

Jerry Green. *University of Oklahoma.*

Presented to the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy at its meeting with the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association, March 3, 2017

§1. Introduction

Nicomachean Ethics (*NE*) X.7-8 has long vexed commentators by apparently endorsing an ‘intellectualist’ view of *eudaimonia*, where contemplation is the sole constituent of happiness. This view is unappealing and implausible on its own terms, but many commentators have also worried that it fits poorly with the preceding books of the *NE*, where moral virtue had been the primary focus. Hence there has been a long-running effort to show that the *NE* actually endorses an ‘inclusivist’ view of *eudaimonia* instead, where moral virtue and contemplation are both features of a single kind of happiness. Some have argued that early *NE* books defend an inclusivist reading, to which we should accommodate *NE* X.¹ Others have argued that X.7-8 is flatly inconsistent with the rest of the *NE*, and should be ignored if not excised.² But the first approach has been subjected to a number of serious criticisms, and the second approach is unmotivated given the numerous connections between X.7-8 and the rest of the *NE*.³ Therefore a new defense of moral virtue’s role in the happy life is required.

A more recent attempt to bolster moral virtue’s role in the flourishing life and avoid intellectualism focuses on the opening lines of *NE* X.8, where Aristotle appears to say that the life of moral virtue is secondarily happy. Richardson Lear gives a helpfully explicit formation of this approach:

That is to say, contemplation will be most final (*teleia*) happiness, the eudaimonic good that never is chosen for the sake of anything else. But there will be another good – morally virtuous activity – that, although less final than contemplation, can nevertheless function as the most final end of a happy (in a secondary way) human life. This secondarily happy and godlike life will be the political life.⁴

Richardson Lear grounds her reading in a similarity she sees between theoretical and practical reason. Likewise, Dominic Scott argues

Working on the assumption that *eudaimonia* consists in the activity that expresses what we are, he now claims that contemplation is primary *eudaimonia* because it is the activity that expresses what we are in the strictest sense. He then argues that moral activity has a qualified similarity to this case: it is the activity of what we are *in some sense*. It therefore derives a claim to be *eudaimonia*, though in a less strict sense than contemplation.⁵

While Richardson Lear grounds the primary/secondary *eudaimonia* distinction in the nature of the relevant constitutive activities, Scott focuses on a similarity between activity and essence. For now, however, we can bracket these differences, and focus on the underlying agreement: there is a second kind

¹ To give just a very incomplete list, see Ackrill (1974), Annas (1988), Bostock (2000), Charles (1999) and (2014), Cooper (1975), Crisp (1994), Devereux (1981), Hardie (1965) and (1979), Irwin (1988), Keyt (1983), Moline (1983), Reeve (2012), Roche (1989), White (1990).

² For questions about the relationship between X.7-8 and the rest of the *NE*, see Brown (2014), Curzer (1990), and Nussbaum (1986). For other ways of approaching this issue, see Moline (1983) and Sullivan (1977).

³ See Lockwood (2014) and Pakaluk (2011) in particular.

⁴ Richardson Lear (2004), p. 193.

⁵ Scott (1999), p. 233.

of *eudaimonia* in addition to the contemplative life, constituted by morally virtuous activity.⁶ Rather than trying to make moral virtue and contemplation two different constituents of a single good life, as the inclusivist reading does, this approach argues that there are two different kinds of *eudaimonia*: the best kind is constituted by contemplation, the second best kind by morally virtuous action. There are many interesting questions about this view, but for our purposes all we need to focus on is that this approach reads *NE* X.8 as arguing for a second kind of happiness. Given how frequently X.8 is translated in a way that accords with this approach, we can call this the ‘standard’ view.⁷

In this paper I argue that we should not read *NE* X.8 as endorsing a second kind of *eudaimonia*. My argument comes in three stages. First, I point out that, strictly speaking, the text leaves unstated what the life of moral virtue secondarily is, so we cannot simply appeal to the text as an explicit endorsement of secondary *eudaimonia*. Second, I argue that there is a well-supported alternative reading according to which Aristotle’s point is about what is primarily or secondarily *human*, not what is primarily or secondarily happy. Hence proponents of the intellectualist reading of the *NE* at least have an option for making sense of X.8’s argument that is consistent with the surrounding discussion. Third, I argue that the alternative reading is, in fact, more plausible than the standard ‘secondary happiness’ reading, because the standard reading commits Aristotle to a conceptual puzzle about *eudaimonia* and to a fallacious inference from what is human to what constitutes happiness. The alternative reading does, however, leave us with questions about what ‘secondarily human’ could mean, which I briefly address building off of recent work on Aristotle’s discussion of humanity.

§2. A Second Reading of ‘Secondary’

We can begin by looking at the relevant passage, which extends across the (editor-inserted) chapter break between *NE* X.7-8. Though we are concerned primarily with the first and last lines of the argument, it is worth recording the full train of thought:

What was said before will fit now also: For what is proper (οικεῖον) for each is best (κράτιστον) and most pleasant to each by nature. For a human this is the life according to *nous*, since a human is this most of all. Therefore, this will also be happiest (εὐδαιμονέστατος). The life according to the other virtue is so secondarily. For the activities according to this are ‘anthropic’ (ἀνθρωπικαί). For we do just acts and brave acts and other virtuous acts with respect to each other, observing what is appropriate to each with respect to contracts and services and all such things in terms of feelings (τοῖς πάθεσι), and these things appear to all be anthropic. And some of them seem to be bound up with the body, and the virtue of character (τοῦ ἤθους) is bound up with the feelings in many respects (πολλὰ). And even *phronesis* is yoked to (συνέζευκται) virtue of character, and this to *phronesis*, since the *archai* of *phronesis* are in accordance with moral virtues and rightness of the moral virtues are in accordance with *phronesis*. And these again would be joined together (συνηρημέναι) with feelings involving the compound (περὶ τὸ σύνθετον). But the virtues of the compound are human (ἀνθρωπικαί). And so too is the life in accordance with these and *eudaimonia*. (1178^a4-22)

On both ends of this argument Aristotle mentions a connection between *eudaimonia* and the life of moral virtue. And I concede that it is quite natural to read the passage as saying that (i) the life of moral virtue is

⁶ As we’ll see in §4 below, there is much to recommend in Scott’s approach in particular, though I think he ultimately errs in taking for granted that there is a second kind of happiness. His point about there being more than one way to think about human nature, however, is crucial, and I will rely on it in what follows.

⁷ Brodie & Rowe (2002) provide “second happiest”, while Crisp (2000) translates the line “happy in a secondary way”, and Ostwald (1962) gives “happy in a secondary sense”. Reeve (2014) writes “happiest, but in a secondary way”. Ross, in Brown’s revised (2009) edition, provides “in a secondary degree the life in accordance with the other kind of virtue is happy”. The closest thing to an accurate translation I have found is Irwin (1999) who writes “[happiest] in a secondary way”, but at least uses brackets to note he is supplying an absent term.

secondarily happiest, at 1178^a9, and (ii) the *eudaimonia* according to moral virtue is anthropic, at 1178^a21-22. But the most natural reading is not always the right one, and I think that this is the case here.

The first thing to note about this passage is that Aristotle does not actually say what the life according to moral virtue (or, more literally, the life according to “the other virtue” (τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν, 1178^a9) secondarily is. Rather, all he says is that this life “is so secondarily” (Δευτέρως δ, 1178^a9). So to translate this line as “is secondarily happy” or “second happiest” or “happiest, but in a secondary way” is, strictly speaking, inaccurate.⁸ Likewise, it is a matter of interpretation to render 1178^a21-22 as “the life and the *eudaimonia* according to [the other virtues]” rather than “the life according to [the other virtues] and also *eudaimonia*”.⁹ Hence we cannot simply point to the text to give evidence that Aristotle thought that the life of moral virtue was a kind of *eudaimonia*.

Of course, even if the text only says “is so secondarily”, it still means “is secondarily *something*”, and it is the interpreter’s task to determine what that something is. The natural answer is to look for the closest adjective, in this case “happiest”. In the next section I will argue that there are problems with this reading. First, however, I want to defend an overlooked alternative.

Looking at our passage as a whole, the focus is on what it is to be human, and on what things count as ‘anthropic’. This focus, I submit, reveals what Aristotle had in mind for his implied predicate at 1078^a9: we should read the line as saying that the life of moral virtue is ‘secondarily human’. This is easiest to see by focusing on the logic of the argument preceding the line in question. The argument is highly enthymematic, so we have to fill in some gaps, but it runs as follows:

- 1) What is proper for *x* is best and most pleasant by nature for *x*
- 2) The proper life for *x* is the life of what *x* is most of all
- 3) A human is *nous* most of all
- 4) The proper life for a human is the noetic life
- 5) The noetic life is the best and most pleasant life
- 6) The best and most pleasant life is the happiest life
- 7) Therefore, the noetic life is the happiest lift

The foundational claim here is that each human is *nous* most of all, a claim made explicitly at 1178^a7 and repeated often elsewhere in the *NE*.¹⁰ It is because each person is *nous* most of all that the noetic life is the proper life for us, i.e. the best and most pleasant life. And because the best and most pleasant life is, by definition, *eudaimonia*, it follows that the noetic life is the happiest life insofar as it is best and most pleasant.

This argument provides us with an alternative for the missing predicate of ‘secondarily’. Rather than looking at the nearest superlative, ‘happiest’, we should go only a few words farther back to another superlative, ‘most human’. So read, 1178^a9 starts a second argument parallel to the first: the life according to *nous* is most human (with the consequence that it is happiest), while the life according to moral virtue is secondarily human (with consequences yet to be investigated). And this is exactly the line of thought continued in the rest of the passage. To paraphrase slightly, the life according to moral virtue is secondarily human, *for* (γὰρ) these activities are human, *for* (γὰρ) they have to do with feelings and are bound up with the body and the compound and all these things are human.¹¹ Given that this line of argument provides support for the position that the life of moral virtue is secondarily human, it makes sense to read the thesis statement of the paragraph as ‘the life of moral virtue is secondarily [human].’

⁸ Broadie (1991), p. 438 n. 72 also rightly notes that most translators read Δευτερός (adjective) rather than Δευτέρως (adverb) as the manuscripts have it. This is another strike against reading ‘secondarily happy’ as something like ‘a second kind of happiness’, even if we were to allow that ‘happy’ or ‘happiest’ is the missing predicate.

⁹ Things are a little better on this score: both Broadie & Rowe (2002) and Ostwald (1962) translate the line in the more accurate, more neutral way.

¹⁰ 1166^a16-17, 1166^a22-23, 1168^b35, 1169^a1, 1169^a15-18, 1170^a16-^b4, 1178^a2-3. We’ll return to this issue in §4.

¹¹ See Whiting (1986), pp. 83-85 for discussion of this line of reasoning.

This reading also makes possible an alternative rendering of the end of the passage. Rather than reading “the life and the *eudaimonia* according to the moral virtues is anthropic”, we can take the passage as saying “the life according to the moral virtues is anthropic, and *eudaimonia* is anthropic”. The implication here would not be that there is a second kind of *eudaimonia* constituted by the life of moral virtue, but rather that *eudaimonia*, even though it is constituted by noetic activity alone (as argued elsewhere in *NE* 7-8), is nevertheless a human life as well, insofar as what it is to be human involves feelings and the body.¹²

This alternative reading of *NE* X.8 is, I think, a natural one given the argumentative context in which it occurs. We only have to go back four words farther to find our antecedent for ‘secondarily’, which gives us a clear parallel structure of ‘the life according to *nous* is most human, the life according to the other virtue is secondarily human’, and so the reading is not strained on syntactic grounds.¹³ But if there are still reservations about the viability of this reading, we can bolster the case for it by pointing to a very close parallel passage only a few chapters earlier. In *NE* X.5 Aristotle gives the following argument.

Whether the activities of the perfect and blessed man (τοῦ τελείου καὶ μακαρίου ἀνδρός) are one or many, they pleasures that complete these should be called human pleasures (ἀνθρώπου ἡδοναὶ) in the strict sense (κυρίως), while the remaining pleasures would be so secondarily or even lower (δευτέρως καὶ πολλοστῶς), as would be the activities. (1176^a26-29).

This passage marks a primary/secondary distinction perfectly parallel to the one in X.8. The pleasures that complete the activities of the happy person are human activities in the strictest sense. As in X.8, Aristotle compares these to a second class, which he says “would be so secondarily”, and here too he leaves the relevant adjective unstated. But in this case the context makes perfectly clear that the suppressed term is ‘human’. And of course the activity that the most human pleasures complete, *qua* activity of the perfect and blessed man, is contemplation (1177^b19-25).¹⁴ Other pleasures, *and other activities*, are human secondarily, or even lower. Hence this passage precisely matches the line of thought in the alternative reading, both syntactically and semantically, which I take it suffices to show that the alternative reading is a viable one.

§3. A Preferable Alternative

So far I’ve argued merely that the alternative reading of 1178^a4-10 is viable option. We should pause to notice that this is an important development on its own, because it gives proponents of the intellectualist reading of the *NE* an interpretation of the X.8 that fits with their view. To the extent that there are independently good reasons for the intellectualist interpretation of the *NE*, it is a strength of the alternative reading that it is consistent with this interpretation. But of course viability is a low standard to meet, and it would be nice if we could provide support for the reading beyond its consistency with intellectualist (which, after all, won’t be persuasive to opponents of this interpretation). Luckily, I think we can meet a higher standard, namely that the alternative reading proposed here is preferable to the standard reading. As I’ll argue in this section, there are two reasons for thinking this. First, the alternative reading better fits the tenor of *NE* X.7-8. Second, the standard reading attributes a fallacious argument to Aristotle, which the alternative reading avoids.

¹² The next line, “But the [*eudaimonia*] of *nous* is separate” (1178^a22) suggests that we shouldn’t infer from the fact that *eudaimonia* is anthropic that *nous* is bound up with the body the way *phronesis*, feelings, and the virtues are. This is, of course, a far larger topic than we can address here, but we will briefly return to it in §4.

¹³ The same goes for taking “according to the [moral virtues]” at 1178^a21 to apply only to “the life” and not to “*eudaimonia*”: the duplicated *ὁ* in *ὁ βίος δὴ ὁ κατὰ ταῦτα*, as well as the placement of the particle and the repeated *καὶ...καὶ*, all seem to me to signal a separation between the two nouns.

¹⁴ See Gurtler (2003) for a detailed discussion of the connection between Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure and contemplation.

By the ‘tenor’ of X.7-8, I mean the tendency in these chapters to go out of its way not only to praise the contemplative life as meeting the criteria for *eudaimonia*, but to denigrate the life of moral virtue as failing to meet these criteria. Outside of our passage, the tone of X.7-8 is almost wholly negative when it comes to whether the life of moral virtue counts as *eudaimonia*. Indeed, it is this very negativity which so surprises commentators, to the extent that some have suggested that X.7-8 is inconsistent with the rest of the *NE*. The number and nature of the criteria for *eudaimonia* Aristotle defends in these chapters is notoriously controversial, and in many ways the debate between intellectualists and inclusivists is a debate about how to read these chapters. I cannot relitigate this debate here, so instead I will only make a few *prima facie* observations.¹⁵

Aristotle argues that contemplation is self-sufficient, because while all humans require certain things regardless of their activity (1177^a28-29), contemplation requires nothing further (1177^a32-^b1); moral virtue, on the other hand, is dependent on further goods beyond these necessities, and is therefore not self-sufficient. (1177^a28-29). Nor is moral virtue desired only for its own sake; unlike contemplation, which aims at nothing further, moral virtue always has some further end beyond its activity (1177^b1-4). For instance, courageous action, while intrinsically valuable, also aims at the preservation of the city in war. For the same reason, virtue is unpleasurable, because it is the activity we perform in order to bring about the conditions for contemplation (1177^b4-15). Even the most noble and respected virtues fail to meet the relevant criteria (1177^b16-18), while contemplation satisfies them all (1177^b19-26).

Aristotle reiterates these points and adds new ones after our passage in X.8. Aristotle repeats that, while both contemplation and moral virtue require basic necessities, moral virtue requires further goods in addition, while contemplation does not; indeed, the more noble and virtuous an action is, the more it is dependent on external goods, and therefore the less self-sufficient it is (1178^a22-^b7). Aristotle adds two further arguments, both of which involve the extension of happy creatures. The gods must be happy, but it’s absurd to think that they engage in morally virtuous activity (1178^b7-23). And animals lack happiness in virtue of their being unable to contemplate (1178^b24-28); apparently Aristotle takes their inability to engage in moral virtue as irrelevant to their non-happiness. And so Aristotle concludes that

As far as contemplation extends, so too does happiness extend, and the more one is able to contemplate, the more one is able to be happy, not contingently but in virtue of the contemplation.... Therefore, happiness would be a kind of (τις) contemplation” (1178^b28-32).

Throughout, the emphasis is always that moral virtue *fails* to meet the relevant criteria, not that it meets the criteria but not as well as contemplation does.

If this is right, then for Aristotle to claim that there is a second kind of happiness, one which is constituted by activity that is not self-sufficient, not final, not functional, and so on, would be quite surprising. Aristotle does not explain how this could be, for instance by explaining how partially meeting a subset of his criteria is good enough, or that there is a second set of criteria he hasn’t defended. On the alternative reading, these problems are easily avoided. *NE* X.7-8 gives a single, consistent line of argument defending the thesis that *eudaimonia* is the contemplative life, with no surprises or underdeveloped assertions. Even the opponents of the intellectualist reading of the *NE* tend to grant that the first-pass reading of X.7-8 is intellectualist in tone, and the alternative reading matches this *prima facie* impression.¹⁶

¹⁵ I defend these points more fully in Green (2016a). I argue that there are in fact seven criteria for *eudaimonia* proposed in *NE* I.7-13, and that *NE* X.6-8 consciously uses the same list. The contemplative life meets all seven criteria, while the hedonistic life fails them all, and the morally virtuous life partially satisfies only one.

¹⁶ See n. 1-3 above. And note that I am not arguing here that *NE* X.7-8 are, in fact, properly interpreted as intellectualist, and that our passage should therefore be interpreted in the same vein. This would run of the risk of begging the question. Rather, I am arguing that outside the passage in question *NE* X.7-8 *appears* to be intellectualist, and that the alternative reading fits this appearance. My argument is compatible with the intellectualist reading being incorrect, if it turns out that the initial appearances of *NE* X.7-8 are misleading. Since

The second advantage of the alternative reading is that it does not commit Aristotle to a fallacious argument. On the alternative reading, Aristotle begins X.8 by stating that the life of moral virtue is secondarily human and then giving an argument to justify this position. This argument is relatively straightforward, proceeding by noting that body, feelings, moral action, *phronesis*, and moral virtues are all interconnected, and that the humanity of some of these phenomena extends through this interconnectedness to the others. On the standard reading, the point that these phenomena are all interconnected and therefore all human is a subsidiary point used to infer that the life of moral virtue is happy. Bostock, I think, gets very close to the truth when he writes “I observe that book X does not provide arguments to show that political activity is in *any* way (a source of) *eudaimonia*, save for the claim that it involves (specifically human) virtues”.¹⁷ But the inference from ‘moral activity is human’ to ‘moral activity is a kind of *eudaimonia*’ is invalid: while a life’s being *primarily* or *essentially* human does entail, by Aristotle’s lights anyway, that it is *eudaimonia*, there is no such entailment between being less than primarily human and *eudaimonia*.

We can see this most easily by comparing a parallel argument. Humans are warm-blooded, and so (on Aristotle’s view) we have to breathe to cool the blood. So, to be human is to be a respirator, and respiration is a precondition for all our other activities. But this doesn’t make respiration a part of *eudaimonia* or a kind of *eudaimonia*, because it is not what is *essentially* human. Our essential nature is, as Aristotle argues in X.7-8, to be thinkers, not to be breathers, *even though* we are necessarily breathers as well as thinkers (and perhaps even though breathing depends on thinking). So a happy life will, of necessity, be respiratory, but this doesn’t make respiration a part of happiness or a kind of happiness.¹⁸ To infer otherwise would be fallacious. Hence we should not attribute this inference to Aristotle. The standard reading commits Aristotle to just this fallacy, while the alternative reading avoids it.

Even so, we might wonder whether Aristotle would have endorsed this argument in spite of (or in ignorance of) its invalidity. After all, Aristotle spends quite a lot of time in *NE* II-IV talking about anthropic topics like moral virtue and feelings. Perhaps he thought that this part of our nature was human enough that human happiness would involve its characteristic activity? I cannot show conclusively that this hypothesis is incorrect. But I can show that it commits Aristotle to a flagrant contradiction within the space of a single Bekker column. For in the paragraph which ends *NE* X.7, Aristotle famously distinguishes our divine and human aspects, telling us “we should not follow those who advise us, being human, to think human thoughts, or, being mortal, to think moral thoughts” (1177^b31-33). Instead, we should live according to the best thing in us, which is what we essentially are; as we’ve seen, this is *nous*. Since Aristotle tells us that “it is not insofar as one is human that one lives” a *eudaimōn* life, but rather “insofar as there is something divine present in him” (1177^b26-27). Aristotle notes later in the argument that “it would be odd (*ἄτοπον*) if one were not to choose his own life, but rather that of something else” (1178^a3-4); this is the line just before our passage. The contrast here is between the life of *nous* and the human life, i.e. the life of the compound (cf. the mention of the *συνθέτου* at 1177^b28-29). For Aristotle to take this back, and say that the life of the compound is *eudaimōn* after all, would also be odd.

There is, however, a move that proponents of the standard reading could make at this point. When Aristotle says that it is not insofar as one is human that one lives a *eudaimōn* life, what he actually refers to is a “complete *eudaimonia*” (*ἡ τελεία δὴ εὐδαιμονία*, 1177^b24). The same locution is used again in

opponents of the intellectualist reading typically grant the point about the initial appearance of *NE* X.7-8, I take it that this way of putting the argument does not beg the question.

¹⁷ Bostock (2000) p. 201 n. 23.

¹⁸ In the language of *Categories* V and *Topics* I.5 and V.5, we might think of the capacity for moral reasoning and activity as *idia* (Latin *propria*), i.e. necessary but non-essential properties. See Irwin (1988), pp. 61-64 and Moravcisk (1967) for discussion of this concept in general, and Whiting (1986) pp. 87-90 for a discussion of the concept applied to the *NE* (though, as will become apparent in §4 below, I disagree with her conclusions). There are metaphysical questions here which lie outside the scope of this paper, but the concept of *idia* at least show that Aristotle is comfortable with the idea of necessary but non-essential properties. I’m indebted to Emily Katz for bringing this comparison to my attention.

nearby passages (1177^a17, 1178^b7).¹⁹ And this locution suggests a contrast, a kind of *eudaimonia* that isn't complete. Indeed, the Richardson Lear passage which we used above to introduce the standard reading takes it in just that way. So, the question is whether "complete *eudaimonia*" implies a contrast with a second kind of *eudaimonia*, which the beginning of X.8 might describe. I think that it does not. One problem with Richardson Lear's reading is that it requires us to read *teleia* with a specific meaning, 'perfect', rather than 'final' or 'complete' as the term can also mean.²⁰ But rather than dive into the well-worn debate over how to translate *teleia*, I will instead note that, whatever the term means, Aristotle is explicit that *eudaimonia* cannot be un-*teleia* (1177^b25-26). If *teleia eudaimonia* is meant to imply a contrast with secondary *eudaimonia*, as the objection goes, then secondary *eudaimonia* would not be *teleia*. But this is an oxymoron. To get this contrast, Aristotle would have to say something like 'primary *eudaimonia*'. But no such locution is used in *NE* X.7-8. Hence I do not find an argument based on a 'teleia/secondary' distinction persuasive.

There is a further benefit of the alternative reading: according to this reading, Aristotle can be read as anticipating an objection, one commonly raised against the intellectualist reading of the *NE*. The worry is that, if happiness is solely constituted by contemplation, then one could be happy and immoral, because one pursues intellectual activity even at the expense of moral activity, focusing only on one's intellectual nature.²¹ On the alternative reading, Aristotle argues that this is a mistake: moral activity is anthropic, and the life according to this activity is anthropic, and *eudaimonia* is anthropic (the same argument is made, I think, at 1178^b33-79^a9). That is, *eudaimonia* is compatible with our compound human nature, even though much of the activity of that compound is not itself part of *eudaimonia*.

§4. Second Nature

But this still leaves us with a puzzle: Why does Aristotle say that the life and *eudaimonia* in accordance with moral virtue is anthropic, if he doesn't want to say that moral virtue constitutes *eudaimonia*?²² What I think is going on in X.8 is that Aristotle is wrestling with a distinction that he doesn't quite have the terminology to express. We should note that when Aristotle refers to *nous* and the contemplative life in X.7-8, he uses the term 'human' (ἄνθρωπος); he also uses the term 'each' (ἕκαστος), as he does in *NE* IX.8-9.²³ But when he refers to moral virtue here, he uses the term 'anthropic' (ἄνθρωπικός) instead.²⁴ What I think is going on here is that Aristotle is gesturing at a distinction between what we might call the person, contrasted with the biological organism.²⁵ In other words, 'human' is ambiguous in Aristotle, an idea proposed by Dominic Scott in making a comparison between Aristotle's

¹⁹ It is also used at 1153^b16-17. But this is a Common Book, which may belong in the *EE*, and it is clear that in the *EE* the phrase 'complete happiness', which is used often (1219^a27-28, 1219^a29-30, 1219^a35-36, 1219^a38-39, 1219^b7-8), is inclusive rather than intellectualist. So I will leave the Common Book reference to one side in what follows.

²⁰ Scott (1999), p. 226 also endorses this reading, and uses it to ground a perfect/secondary happiness distinction. But at 1177^b24 it is fairly clear that it means 'complete', because he immediately uses the term a second time to describe a "complete life" and says that "None of the things *eudaimonia* concerns are incomplete" (1177^b25-26). Presumably when Aristotle uses the same term three times he uses it with consistent meaning. And in the discussion of *NE* X.7 discussed above, Aristotle argues that contemplation is final while moral activity is always chosen for the sake of something else (i.e. the results of moral action).

²¹ Cooper (1975), pp. 162-166 is the *locus classicus* for this long-running debate. See, *inter alia*, Cooper (1987), Kraut (1989), Lawrence (2005), Richardson Lear (2004), Tuozzo (1995), Walker (2015), White (1995).

²² Cf. Broadie (1991), pp. 403-08.

²³ E.g., 1166^a16-23, 1168^b34-69^a3, 1178^a2-3. Cf. Owens (1988), pp. 707-08, 714-16.

²⁴ I'm hesitant to put too much weight on this observation, but all 10 instances of ἄνθρωπικόν in the *NE* occur in the context of discussing feelings, sensations, or social relations, all things involved with the human compound rather than *nous* as contemplator. But see n. 25 below.

²⁵ Note that 'person' here would include the gods and other agents, but would exclude non-rational creatures.

treatment of friendship and *eudaimonia* very similar to the one we have just engaged in.²⁶ In the *NE* ‘human’ often refers to the biological organism, counted among (1117^a5-7, 1118^b2-3, 1155^a16-21, 1176^a3-8) or contrasted with (1102^b2-6, 1102^b11-12, 1162a16-19, 1170^b10-14) other organisms. Aristotle’s focus on biological humans leads him to conceive of humans as a compound (1178^a9-21, 1102^a27-32), a compound frequently hampered by its less valuable components (1100^b8-11, 1110^a23-27, 1111^b1-3, 1115^b7-11, 1126^a29-30, 1163^b22-27, 1167^b25-30, 1175^a1-5, 1176^a19-21, 1178^b33-35).²⁷

Many of these passages focus on moral virtue as human, and one may worry that it would be unfair to posit more than one sense of ‘human’ rather than try to find an interpretation of Aristotle that allows a consistent usage. But Aristotle himself gives us a principle for doing otherwise. When defending the position that self-love is properly speaking love of *nous*, Aristotle argues “Just as the most authoritative part seems to be the city or any other compound most of all (μάλιστα εἶναι), the same holds for ‘human’ (1168^b31-33). So, just as ‘Athens’ can refer to the whole city or to the government that rules it, ‘human’ can refer both to the compound of body and soul, or it can refer only to the most authoritative part of the soul that leads the compound.”²⁸

It should be no surprise, then, that Aristotle uses ‘human’ to refer to what is most essential about our nature, whether this is explicitly identified with *nous* or not.²⁹ The proper diagnosis here, I think, is that Aristotle lacks a term for ‘person’, and so uses ‘human’ instead, which would explain why, in addition to saying that *nous* is human most of all, will often say instead that *nous* is “each” most of all (1166^a16-23, 1168^b34-69^a3, 1178^a2-3).³⁰ In any case, Aristotle is explicit that ‘human’ can refer to a part and to the whole, and so we should take him literally when he calls *nous* ‘most human’. In Aristotle’s mind, there is no conflict here: what is most essential to us is not our biological features or the lower parts of the soul, but rather reason alone. This puts moral activity outside the realm of humanity in the strictest sense, and it is therefore not the central focus of an inquiry into human nature and the human good.

§4. Conclusion

In this paper I’ve raised some problems for the standard reading of *NE* X.8, and argued that the alternative reading, where Aristotle discusses what is secondarily human rather than secondarily happy, is preferable. This does not prove conclusively that the alternative reading is the correct one, nor that the standard reading is wrong. But it does show that the passage in question is more problematic than is typically thought. This means that inclusivist interpreters of the *NE* will need to either do more work to support the standard reading, or find another way of defending their interpretation. The intellectualist interpretation, by contrast, has a straightforward way of reading all of *NE* X.7-8 in a consistent way.³¹

²⁶ See Scott (1999), though note that Scott reads 1178^a9 as “secondarily happy”. See also Bush (2008), Cooper (1975), Thorsrud (2015), and Whiting (1986). See Ward (2007) for an exploration of this idea in Aristotle’s biology.

²⁷ Note that Aristotle uses different terms throughout, e.g. ἀνθρώπεια, ἀνθρωπικός, ἀνθρώπινος and ἄνθρωπος. Though there may be some weak patterns here, there are no hard and fast distinctions in how Aristotle uses the terms.

²⁸ Cf. Cooper (1975), pp. 171-73. Bostock (2000) p. 196 apparently misses this passage, and so admits that he cannot make sense of the claim that a person is her intellect. Likewise, Whiting (1986)’s argument that Aristotle only endorses the conditional ‘if humans are *nous* most of all then contemplation will be *eudaimonia*’, not the antecedent, fails to grasp with this passage and the many times Aristotle says precisely that each is *nous* most of all.

²⁹ See 1112^a31-34, 1170^b10-13, 1177^b19-25, 1178^a4-8 for the first category, 1097^b24-33, 1098^a5-17, 1102^a14-17, 1106^a21-24, 1112^b31-32, 1113^b17-19, 1161^b5-6, 1176^a24-29 for the second. I’ve argued in Green (2016b) that these two categories both refer to *nous* as a single part of the soul.

³⁰ Cf. Owens (1988), pp. 707-08, 714-16.

³¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the History of Philosophy Circle at Michigan State University, and I am grateful to the participants, especially Debra Nails, Ariel Helfer, and Emily Katz, for their insightful comments.

WORKS CITED

- Ackrill, J.L. (1974). "Aristotle on Eudaimonia", reprinted in A.O. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*: Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 15-33.
- Annas, Julia. (1988). "Aristotle on Virtue and Happiness" reprinted in N. Sherman (ed.), *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 35-55.
- Bostock, David. (2000). *Aristotle's Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Broadie, Sarah. (1991). *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Broadie, Sarah & Rowe, Christopher (2002). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Eric. (2014). "Aristotle on the Choice of Lives: Two Concepts of Self-Sufficiency", in P. Destree & M. Zingano (eds.) *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics*. Aristote: Traductions et Études. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 111-133.
- Bush, Stephen (2008). "Divine and Human Happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics*". *The Philosophical Review* 117:49-75.
- Charles, David. (2014). "Eudaimonia, Theôria, and the Choiceworthiness of Practical Wisdom", in P. Destree & M. Zingano (eds.) *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics*. Aristote: Traductions et Études. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 89-109.
- (1999). "Aristotle on Well-Being and Contemplation I". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Vol.* 73:205-223.
- Cooper, John. "Contemplation and Happiness: A Reconsideration". *Synthese* 72: 187-216.
- (1975). *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crisp, Roger (2000). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1994). "Aristotle's Inclusivism." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 12:111-136.
- Crittenden, P. (1996). "Aristotle and the Idea of Competing Forms of Life". *Philosophical Inquiry* 18:88-100.
- Curzer, Howard. (1990). "Criteria for Happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 and X.6-8". *Classical Quarterly* 40: 421-32.
- Dahl, Norman. (2011). "Contemplation and eudaimonia in the *Nicomachean Ethics*", J. Miller (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 66-91.
- Destree, P & Zingano, M. (eds) (2014). *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics*. Aristote: Traductions et Études. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters.
- Devereux, Daniel. (2014). "Theôria and Praxis in Aristotle's Ethics", in P. Destree & M. Zingano (eds.) *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics*. Aristote: Traductions et Études. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 159-205.
- (1981). "Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness", in D.J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 249-260.
- Donini, Pierluigi. (2014). "Happiness and THEÔRIA in Books I and X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*", in P. Destree & M. Zingano (eds.) *Theoria: Studies on the Status and Meaning of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics*. Aristote: Traductions et Études. Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 7-20.
- Green, Jerry (2016a). *Humanity and Divinity in Aristotle's Ethics* (Doctoral Dissertation). Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin.
- (2016b) "Practical Nous in Aristotle's Ethics". *Newsletter for the Society of Ancient Greek Philosophy* 16 (2016):11-17.
- Gurtler, Gary (2003). "The Activity of Happiness in Aristotle's Ethics". *The Review of Metaphysics* 56:801-834.
- Hardie, W.F.R. (1979). "Aristotle on the Best Life for a Man". *Philosophy* 54:35-50.
- (1965). "The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics". *Philosophy* 40:277-295.
- Irwin, Terence (1999). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.
- (1988). *Aristotle's First Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Keyt, David. (1983). "Intellectualism in Aristotle" in J.P. Anton & A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy II*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 364-387.

- Lawrence, Gavin (2005). "Snakes in Paradise: Problems in the Ideal Life". *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43: 126-165.
- Lear, Gabriel Richardson. (2004). *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lockwood, Thornton. (2014). "Competing Ways of Life and Ring Composition (NE X 6-8)", in R. Polansky (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 350-369.
- Miller, Jon (ed.). (2011). *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moline, Jon. (1983). "Contemplation and the Human Good". *Nous* 17:37-53.
- Moravcsik, J.M.E. (1967). "Aristotle on Predication". *The Philosophical Review* 76:80-96.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. (1986). *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostwald, Martin. (1962). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Owens, Joseph. (1988). "The Self in Aristotle". *Review of Metaphysics* 41:707-722.
- Pakaluk, Michael. (2011). "On the Unity of the *Nicomachean Ethics*", in J. Miller (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23-44.
- (2005). *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Polansky, Ronald (ed.) (2014). *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reeve, C.D.C. (2014). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.
- (2012). *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness: An Essay on Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Roche, Timothy. (1989). "The Perfect Happiness". *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27:103-125.
- Scott, Dominic. (1999). "Aristotle on Well-Being and Contemplation II: Primary and Secondary *Eudaimonia*". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Vol.* 73:225-242.
- Sullivan, Roger J. (1977). "Some Suggestions for Interpreting *Eth. Nic.* 10. 7-8". *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15:129-138.
- Thorsrud, Harald (2015). "Aristotle's Dichotomous Anthropology: What is Most Human in the *Nicomachean Ethics*?" *Apeiron* 48:1-22.
- Tuozzo, Thomas (1995). "Contemplation, the Noble, and the Mean: The Standard of Moral Virtue in Aristotle's Ethics". *Apeiron* 28:129-154.
- Walker, Mathew (2015). "How Narrow is Aristotle's Contemplative Ideal?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Advance Online Publication. DOI: 10.1111/phpr.12194.
- Ward, Julie K. (2007). "Is Human a Homonym for Aristotle?" in J. Mouracade (ed.) *Aristotle on Life*. Kelowna, BC: Academic Printing and Publishing, 75-98.
- White, Nicholas. (1995). "Conflicting Parts of Happiness in Aristotle's Ethics". *Ethics* 105:258-283.
- White, Stephen A. (1990). "Is Aristotelian Happiness a Good Life or the Best Life?", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 8:103-143.
- Whiting, Jennifer. (1986). "Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle". *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 68:70-95.